S0 5/986

background notes

Somalia

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs

April 1986

NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY
JUL 22 1986
U. S. GOVT. PUBS.
DEPOSITORY 376

Official Name: Somali Democratic Republic

PROFILE

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*—Somali(s). **Population** (1985 est.): 5,400,000. **Annual growth rate:** 3.0%. **Ethnic groups:** 98.8% Somali, 1.2% Arab and Asian. **Religion:** 99% Muslim. **Language:** Somali. **Education:** *Years compulsory*—12. *Attendance*—50% primary, 7% secondary. *Literacy*—40%. **Health:** *Infant mortality rate*—145/1,000. *Life expectancy*—47 yrs. **Work force** (2.2 million): *Agriculture*—82%. *Industry and commerce*—13%. *Government*—5%.

Geography

Area: 686,803 sq. km. (246,000 sq. mi.); about the size of California. **Cities:** *Capital*—Mogadishu (pop. 700,000 est.). *Other city*—Hargeisa (150,000 est.). **Terrain:** Central and southern Somalia are flat; northern Somalia is hilly. **Climate:** Hot and dry with seasonal monsoons.

Government

Type: Independent republic. **Independence:** July 1, 1960. **Constitution:** August 1979.

Branches: *Executive*—president. *Legislative*—People's Assembly. *Judicial*—Supreme Court.

Administrative subdivisions: 15 regions.

Political party: Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party. **Suffrage:** Universal over 18.

Central government budget (1984): $380 million.

Defense (1983): 29% of government expenditures.

Flag: Five-pointed white star in azure field.

Economy

GNP (1985 at current prices): $1.8 billion. **Annual growth rate** (1985 est.): 3.1%. **Per capita income:** $300. **Avg. inflation rate** (1985): 30%.

Natural resources: Undetermined quantities of various minerals, including petroleum.

Agriculture (55% of GDP at factor cost): *Products*—livestock, bananas, corn, sorghum, sugar. *Arable land*—13%, of which 1.2% is cultivated.

Industry (7% of GDP): *Types*—sugar, textiles, packaging, oil refining.

Trade (1985): *Exports*—$110 million: livestock, bananas, hides and skins. *Major markets*—Saudi Arabia, Italy, North Yemen. *Imports*—$470 million: food grains, animal and vegetable oils, petroleum products, transport equipment. *Major suppliers*—Italy, Saudi Arabia, US, France, UK.

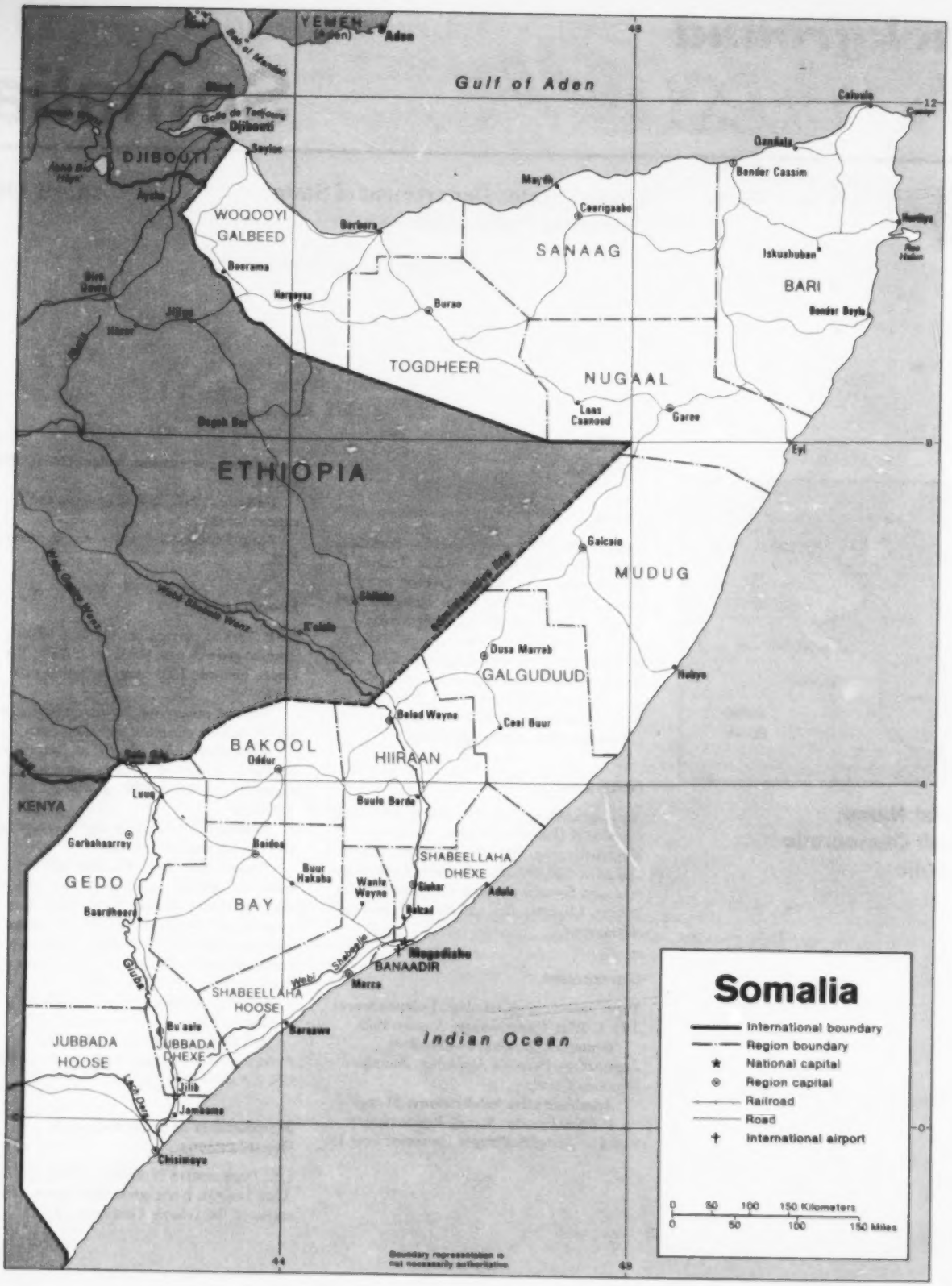
Official exchange rate: 55 Somali shillings = US$1.

Aid disbursed (1985): $400 million. *Primary donors*—Italy, Saudi Arabia, IBRD, US. *US aid*—$110 million.

Membership in International Organizations

UN, Organization of African Unity (OAU), Arab League. Nonaligned Movement, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

S1.123:



READEX FICHE

PEOPLE

Somalis have a remarkably homogeneous culture and identity. As early as the seventh century A.D., indigenous Cushitic peoples began to mingle with Arab and Persian traders who had settled along the coast. Interaction over the centuries led to the emergence of a Somali culture bound by common traditions, a single language, and the Islamic faith.

Today, about 60% of all Somalis are nomadic or seminomadic pastoralists who raise cattle, camels, sheep, and goats. About 25% of the population are settled farmers who live mainly in the fertile agricultural zone between the Juba and Shebelle Rivers in southern Somalia.

Sizable ethnic groups in the country include some 35,000 Arabs, about 2,000 Italians, and 1,000 Indians and Pakistanis. Nearly all inhabitants speak the Somali language, which remained unwritten until October 1973, when the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) proclaimed it the nation's official language and decreed an orthography using Latin letters. Somali is now the language of instruction in all schools. Arabic, English, and Italian are also used extensively.

GEOGRAPHY

Somalia is located on the east coast of Africa north of the Equator and, with Ethiopia and Djibouti, is often referred to as the Horn of Africa. It comprises Italy's former Trust Territory of Somalia and the former British Protectorate of Somaliland. The coastline extends 2,720 kilometers (1,700 mi.).

The northern part of the country is hilly, and in many places the altitude ranges between 900 and 2,100 meters (3,000–7,000 ft.) above sea level. The central and southern areas are flat, with an average altitude of less than 180 meters (600 ft.). The Juba and the Shebelle Rivers rise in Ethiopia and flow south across the country toward the Indian Ocean. The Shebelle, however, does not reach the sea.

Major climatic factors are a year-round hot climate, seasonal monsoon winds, and irregular rainfall with recurring droughts. Mean daily maximum temperatures range from 30°C to 40°C (85°F–105°F), except at higher elevations and along the east coast. Mean daily minimums usually vary from about 15°C to 30°C (60°F–85°F). The southwest monsoon, a cool sea breeze, makes the period from about May to October the most pleasant season at Mogadishu. The December–February period of the northeast monsoon is also comfortable. The "Tangambili" periods that intervene between the two monsoons (October–November and March–May) are hot and humid.

HISTORY

Early history traces the development of the Somali people to an Arab sultanate, which was founded in the seventh century A.D. by Koreishite immigrants from Yemen. During the 15th and 16th centuries, Portuguese traders landed in present Somali territory and ruled several coastal towns. The sultan of Zanzibar subsequently took control of these towns and their surrounding territory.

Somalia's modern history began in the late 19th century, when various European powers began to trade and establish themselves in the area. The British East India Company's desire for unrestricted harbor facilities led to the conclusion of treaties with the sultan of Tajura as early as 1840. It was not until 1886, however, that the British gained control over northern Somalia through treaties with various Somali chiefs who were guaranteed British protection. British objectives centered on safeguarding trade links to the east and securing local sources of food and provisions. The boundary between Ethiopia and British Somaliland was established in 1897 through treaty negotiations between British negotiators and King Menelik.

During the first two decades of this century, British rule was challenged through persistent attacks led by the Islamic nationalist leader Mohamed Abdullah. A long series of intermittent engagements and truces ended in 1920 when British warplanes bombed Abdullah's stronghold at Taleex. Although Abdullah was defeated as much by rival Somali factions as by British forces, he was lauded as a popular hero and stands as a major figure of Somali national identity.

In 1885, Italy obtained commercial advantages in the area from the sultan of Zanzibar and in 1889 concluded agreements with the sultans of Obbia and Caluula, who placed their territories under Italy's protection. Between 1897 and 1908, Italy made agreements with the Ethiopians and the British that marked out the boundaries of Italian Somaliland. The Italian Government assumed direct administration, giving the territory colonial status.

Italian occupation gradually extended inland. In 1924, the Jubaland Province of Kenya, including the town and port of Kismayo, was ceded to Italy by the United Kingdom. The subjugation and occupation of the independent sultanates of Obbia and Mijertein, begun in 1925, were completed in 1927. In the late 1920s, Italian and Somali influence expanded into the Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia. Continuing incursions climaxed in 1935 when Italian forces launched an offensive that led to the capture of Addis Ababa and the Italian annexation of Ethiopia in 1936.

Following Italy's declaration of war on the United Kingdom in June 1940, Italian troops overran British Somaliland and drove out the British garrison. In 1941, British forces began operations against the Italian East African Empire and quickly brought the greater part of the Italian Somaliland under British control. From 1941 to 1950, while Somalia was under British military administration, transition toward self-government was begun through the establishment of local courts, planning committees, and the Protectorate Advisory Council. In 1948, Britain turned the Ogaden and neighboring Somali territories over to Ethiopia.

In Article 23 of the 1947 peace treaty, Italy renounced all rights and titles to Italian Somaliland. In accordance with treaty stipulations, on September 15, 1948, the Four Powers referred the question of disposal of former Italian colonies to the UN General Assembly. On November 21, 1949, the General Assembly adopted a resolution recommending that Italian Somaliland be placed under an international trusteeship system for 10 years, with Italy as the administering authority, followed by independence for Italian Somaliland. In 1959, at the request of the Somali Government, the UN General Assembly advanced the date of independence from December 2 to July 1, 1960.

Meanwhile, rapid progress toward self-government was being made in British Somaliland. Elections for the Legislative Assembly were held in February 1960, and one of the first acts of the new legislature was to request that the United Kingdom grant the area independence so that it could be united with Italian Somaliland when the latter became independent. The protectorate became independent on June 26, 1960;

5 days later, on July 1, it joined Italian Somaliland to form the Somali Republic.

In June 1961, Somalia adopted its first national constitution in a country-wide referendum, which provided for a democratic state with a parliamentary form of government based on European models. During the early post-independence period, political parties reflected clan loyalties and brought a basic split between the regional interests of the former British-controlled north and the Italian-controlled south. There was also substantial conflict between pro-Arab, pan-Somali militants intent on national unification with the Somali-inhabited territories in Ethiopia and Kenya and the "modernists", who wished to give priority to economic and social development and improving relations with other African countries. Gradually, the Somali Youth League (SYL), formed under British auspices in 1943, assumed a dominant position and succeeded in cutting across regional and clan loyalties. Under the leadership of Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, prime minister from 1967 to 1969, Somalia greatly improved its relations with Kenya and Ethiopia. The process of party-based constitutional democracy came to an abrupt end, however, on October 21, 1969, when the army and police, led by Maj. Gen. Mohamed Siad, seized power in a bloodless coup.

Following the coup, executive and legislative power was vested in the 20-member Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), headed by Maj. Gen. Siad as president. The SRC pursued a course of "scientific socialism" that reflected both ideological and economic dependence on the Soviet Union. The government instituted a national security service, centralized control over information, and initiated a number of grassroots development projects. Perhaps the most impressive success was a crash program that introduced an orthography for the Somali language and brought literacy to a large percentage of the population.

The SRC became increasingly radical in foreign affairs, and in 1974, Somalia and the Soviet Union concluded a treaty of friendship and cooperation. As early as 1972, tensions began increasing along the Somali-Ethiopian border. In the mid-1970s, the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) began guerrilla operations in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. Fighting increased, and in July 1977, the Somali National Army (SNA) crossed into the Ogaden to support the insurgents. The SNA moved quickly toward Harer, Jijiga, and Dire Dawa, the principal cities of the region. Subsequently, the Soviet Union, Somalia's most important source of arms, embargoed weapons shipments to Somalia. The Soviets switched their full support to Ethiopia, with massive infusions of Soviet arms and 10,000–15,000 Cuban troops. In November 1977, President Siad expelled all Soviet advisers and abrogated the friendship agreement with the U.S.S.R. In March 1978, Somali forces retreated into Somalia; however, the WSLF continues to carry out sporadic but greatly reduced guerrilla activity in the Ogaden.

Following the 1977 Ogaden war, President Siad looked to the West for international support, military equipment, and economic aid. The United States and other Western countries traditionally were reluctant to provide arms because of the Somali Government's support for insurgency in Ethiopia. In 1978, the United States reopened the USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) mission in Somalia. Two years later, an agreement was concluded that gave U.S. forces access to military facilities in Somalia. In the summer of 1982, Ethiopian forces invaded Somalia along the central border, and the United States provided two emergency airlifts to help Somalia defend its territorial integrity.

Somalia hosts about 600,000 refugees, many of whom are ethnic Somalis fleeing Ethiopian oppression in the Ogaden. About 500,000 refugees live in 35 camps, while the remainder live off the land or in urban areas. The rapid influx of refugees has strained the Somali economy, and extensive aid has been required to avert health and nutritional catastrophes. Refugee assistance is administered under the auspices of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, which oversees cooperative efforts by several dozen private, governmental, and international agencies. The World Food Program coordinates a large refugee feeding program that recently has distributed 120,000 metric tons of food per year.

GOVERNMENT

Following the 1977 break with the Soviet Union, Somalia embarked on more liberal economic and political policies. A new Somali constitution, approved by 99% of the popular vote in an August 1979 referendum, restored many civil rights and initiated a trend toward more moderate government. A People's Assembly was created; the role of the private commercial sector was recognized; Islam became the official religion (with a warning that radical fundamentalists would not be tolerated); and official Somali Government policy on Somali-inhabited territories outside Somalia became less bellicose. The People's Assembly was elected in December 1979 and first convened in January 1980. The dynamics of this new system are still evolving, and President Siad continues to exert strong centralized authority.

Much of Somalia's judicial system is based on Islamic law and was not significantly changed after the 1969 coup. The Supreme Court is the highest judicial authority, presided over by civilian justices with jurisdiction over civil, penal, administrative, and financial affairs. In 1970, the SRC established the National Security Court, which is responsible for cases involving state security.

For administrative purposes, Somalia is divided into 15 regions, each governed by a Regional Revolutionary Council whose members are appointed by President Siad.

Principal Government Officials

President—Maj. Gen. Mohamed Siad Barre
First Vice President and Minister of Defense—Brig. Gen. Mohamed Ali Samantar
Second Vice President and Minister of Planning—Maj. Gen. Hussein Kulmie Afrah

Other Ministers
Foreign Affairs—Abdurahman Jama Barre
Finance—Mohamed Sheikh Osman
Agriculture—Bile Rafle Gulaid
Interior—Ahmed Suleiman Abdalla
Fisheries—Aden Mohamed Ali
Water and Mineral Resources—Ahmed Mohamud Farah
Industry and Commerce—Abdalla Mohamed Fadil
Information—Mohamed Omar Jess
Health—Yusuf Hassan Elmi

Ambassador to the United States—Mohamed Haji Nur
Ambassador to the UN—Abdullahi Said Osman

The Somali Democratic Republic maintains an embassy in the United States at 600 New Hampshire Avenue NW., Suite 710, Washington, D.C. 20037.

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

All political parties were abolished soon after the 1969 coup. In 1976, following several years of preparation, the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP) was created by a founding party congress. The new party replaced the Supreme Revolutionary Council, and its leading members were absorbed into the party's 69-member central committee. The SRSP is responsible for publicizing the government's policies and for assuring implementation. Opposition is not tolerated. In 1975, 10 Muslim leaders, known as mullahs, were executed for opposing a law that guaranteed women's rights. In June 1982, the government imprisoned several parliamentarians, who remain in jail for alleged acts contrary to state security. The Somali Government is striving to improve the economy, health care, and literacy. Muslim influence is evident but not pervasive.

In the December 1979 People's Assembly elections, citizens voted on a slate of 150 candidates. Ninety-nine percent of those voting favored the slate promulgated by the SRSP. During the most recent election, held in 1984, an unopposed slate of SRSP candidates received 99.9% of the vote.

ECONOMY

Somalia lacks natural resources and faces major development challenges. Its economy is pastoral and agricultural, with livestock—prinicipally camels, cattle, sheep, and goats—representing the main form of wealth. Because rainfall is scanty and irregular, farming is generally limited to certain coastal districts, areas near Hargeisa, and the Juba and Shebelle River valleys. The modern sector of the agricultural economy consists mainly of banana plantations located in the south, which use modern irrigation systems and up-to-date farm machinery.

A small fishing industry has begun in the north where tuna, shark, and other warm-water fish are caught. Aromatic woods—frankincense and myrrh—from a small forest area also contribute to the country's exports. Minerals, including petroleum, natural gas, and uranium, are found throughout the country, but none have been exploited commercially. Several oil companies are exploring for petroleum. With the help of foreign aid, small industries such as textiles, handicrafts, meat processing, and printing are being established.

There are no railways in Somalia; internal transportation is by truck and bus. The national road system comprises 14,400 kilometers (9,000 mi.) of roads that include about 2,400 kilometers (1,500 mi.) of all-weather roads.

Air transportation is provided by Air Djibouti, Alitalia, Kenya Airways, and Somali Airways. They provide service to Djibouti, Cairo, Nairobi, Rome, Frankfurt, Sanaa, Abu Dhabi, and Jidda. The Somali national airline also provides internal service.

The European Community and the World Bank jointly financed construction of a deepwater port at Mogadishu. The Soviet Union improved Somalia's deepwater port at Berbera in 1969. Facilities at Berbera were further improved by a U.S. military construction program completed in 1985. The United States is currently renovating a deepwater port at Kismayo that serves the fertile Juba River basin and is vital to Somalia's banana export industry. Smaller ports are located at Merca, Brava, and Bosaso.

Radiotelephone service is available to Aden, Zanzibar, and Nairobi, as well as to Rome and London. Most small towns and villages are linked to the capital by telephone and telegraph. Radio broadcasting stations operate at Mogadishu and at Hargeisa with programs in Somali, English, Italian, Swahili, and Arabic.

The Siad government has assumed a direct role in developing the national economy. In 1970, foreign banks and several other foreign-controlled firms were nationalized. Officially, however, foreign private investment is welcomed, provided it conforms to the government's plans for social and economic development. Since 1981, the government has undertaken a series of major economic reforms in compliance with three successive International Monetary Fund standby agreements.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Since independence, Somalia has followed a foreign policy of nonalignment. It has received major economic assistance from the United States, Italy, and the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as from the Soviet Union and China. The government has sought close ties with many Arab countries.

The status of expatriate Somalis is an important foreign and domestic issue. A goal of Somali nationalism is to unite the other Somali-inhabited territories with the republic consistent with the objectives of pan-Somali tradition. This issue has been a major cause of past crises between Somalia and its neighbors—Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti.

In 1963, Somalia severed diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom for a period following a dispute over Kenya's northeastern region (Northern Frontier District), an area inhabited mainly by Somalis. Somalia urged self-determination for the people of the area, while Kenya refused to consider any steps that might threaten its territorial integrity. Related problems have arisen from the undemarcated boundary with Ethiopia and the large-scale migrations of Somali nomads between Ethiopia and Somalia. Since 1981, the Somali Government and Kenya have embarked on a rapprochement that brought an exchange of senior Kenyan and Somali officials in May 1983, and a visit to Mogadishu by Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi in July 1984.

Travel Notes

Customs: A visa and valid certification of cholera inoculation are required for entry; other customs procedures are not difficult. Dollars and travelers checks are easily exchanged for Somali shillings at local banks. A currency declaration must be filled out before entering the country.

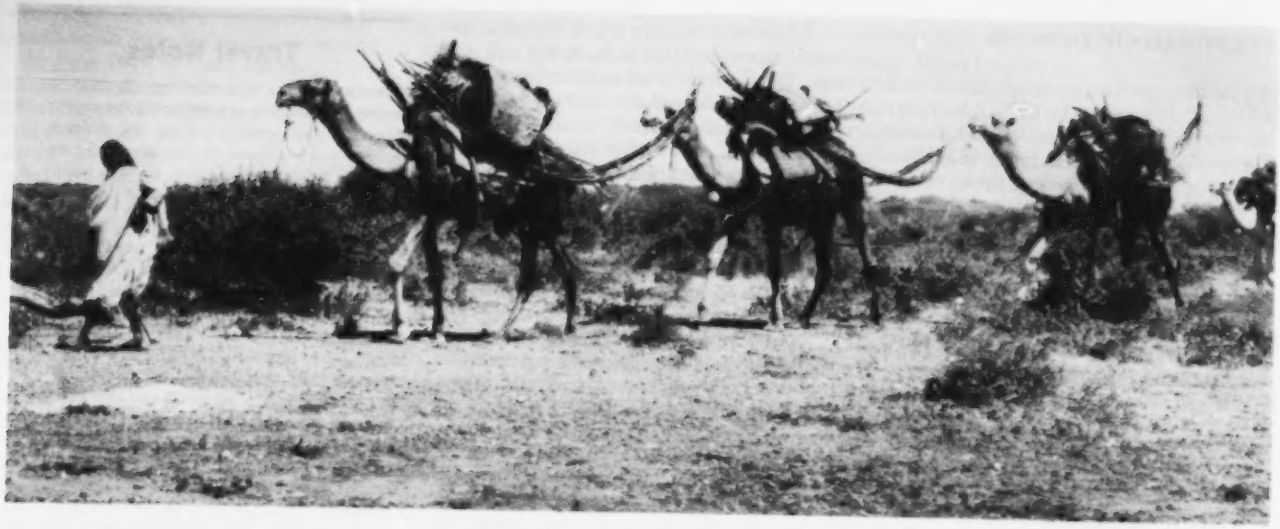
Transportation: International air flights arrive at the Mogadishu Airport. Adequate accommodations are available at the Juba Hotel and others in Mogadishu; accommodations outside the capital are rustic. Prices can be high, and consumer goods are often scarce. Only minimal health facilities are available. Somalia is 8 hours ahead of eastern standard time and does not observe daylight-saving time.

Tourist attractions: Somalia has not made extensive efforts to develop the foreign tourist industry, and most foreigners visit on official business. However, Somalia has lovely beaches and various species of East African wildlife.

Local holidays: Businesses and the US Embassy may be closed on the following Somali national holidays:

Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day (northern region)	June 26
Independence Day	July 1
Idd El Fitr (End of Ramadan)	July 11-12*
Idd El Adha	September 16-17*
Revolution Day	October 21-22
Prophet's Birthday	December 16

*Subject to change depending on the lunar phase and confirmation by the Somali Government.



Above: Nomads transport all their belongings, including their houses, by camel.
Right: Downtown Mogadishu, an aerial view.

Further Information

These titles are provided as a general indication of material published on this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

Andrejewski, B.W., and I.M. Lewis. *Somali Poetry.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.

Coleman, James, and Carl Rosberg. *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

Contini, Paolo. *The Somali Republic: An Experiment in Legal Integration.* London: Case, 1969.

Crozier, Brian. *The Soviet Presence in Somalia.* London: Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1975.

Farer, Tom J. *War Clouds on the Horn of Africa: A Crisis for Detente.* New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1976.

Laitin, David D. *Politics, Language, and Thought: The Somali Experience.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Spencer, John Hathaway. *Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and U.S. Policy.* Cambridge: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1977.

Thompson, Virginia, and Richard Adloff. *Djibouti and the Horn of Africa.* Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1968.

Available from the Superintendent of Documents, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402:

American University. *Somalia, A Country Study.* 3d ed. 1982.

Burgett, Charles L., and C.M. Heyda. *Gazetteer of Somalia.* Washington, D.C.: Defense Mapping Agency, 1982.

Cassanelli, Lee V. *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600-1900.* Phildelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

U.S. Department of State. *Somalia Post Report.* November 1982.

For information on economic trends, commercial development, production, trade regulations, and tariff rates, contact the International Trade Administration, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC 20230.

In the aftermath of the 1977–78 Somali-Ethiopian war, the Government of Somalia continued to call for self-determination for ethnic Somalis living in the Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia. At the March 1983 Nonaligned Movement summit in New Delhi, President Siad stated that Somalia harbors no expansionist aims and is willing to negotiate with Ethiopia.

DEFENSE

The Somali National Army is made up of the army, navy, air force, and air defense command. High-ranking army officials play a major role in Somalia's political affairs. The total strength of the army is about 50,000 personnel. Most Somali military equipment and weaponry are Soviet hardware delivered between 1972 and 1977. About 50% of that equipment was lost during the 1977 Ogaden war, and much of the remainder is rapidly deteriorating. In recent years, the government has turned to Western countries in seeking new and modern weaponry for its military. Western military aid has centered on modest deliveries of defensive arms, training, and improved maintenance. The People's Republic of China, Egypt, Italy, Saudi Arabia, and the United States have provided most of Somalia's recent foreign military assistance. The Somali Government continues to face military challenges from two rebel groups—the Somali National Movement and the Somali Democratic Salvation Front, which carry out attacks against Somali military and police installations, and benefit from significant foreign support.

U.S.-SOMALI RELATIONS

U.S.-Somali relations are excellent. President Siad visited the United States in 1982; this visit has been followed by numerous high-level exchanges between U.S. and Somali officials. After the Soviets were expelled, the United States reintroduced the AID program in 1978 and has provided extensive relief to Somali refugees. In 1980, the United States and Somalia signed a military access agreement that allows U.S. forces access to Somali port and airfield facilities. In 1981, the United States began providing security assistance to Somalia. U.S. economic aid in FY 1985 consisted of $17 million for development assistance, $30 million in economic support funds, $34 million in military assistance, and $21 million in PL–480 Title I and Title II food aid.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador—Peter S. Bridges
Deputy Chief of Mission—John L. Hirsch
Public Affairs Officer (USIS)—Thomas Hull
Mission Director (AID)—Louis Cohen

The U.S. Embassy is located at Corso Primo Luglio, Mogadishu (tel. 28011) and is open from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Sunday through Thursday.■

Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs • Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • April 1986
Editor: Juanita Adams

Department of State Publication 7881
Background Notes Series • This material is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission; citation of this source would be appreciated.

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402